



In January of 2010, the Obama Administration announced a major policy change: economic development opportunities and environmental benefits will now be considered as part of the criteria for funding transit--and particularly streetcar projects. Congressman Blumenauer has worked hard to make sure transit projects are thoroughly evaluated, and he is pleased to see President Obama, Secretary LaHood, and The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) taking concrete steps that will help make our communities more livable. Additionally, the FTA has rescinded Bush administration restrictions that made it all but impossible for streetcar projects to get funded.

While a member of the Portland, OR City Council, then-Public Works Commissioner Earl Blumenauer championed the reintroduction of Portland's streetcar as a way to connect two major destinations: a teaching hospital and Portland State University. When it opened in July, 2001, the Portland Streetcar was the first modern streetcar to operate in a major US city in over 50 years. It soon proved to be an unqualified success, quickly passing its ridership projections and spurring the transformation of a former warehouse district into the City's hottest real estate market.

The Portland streetcar has now attracted \$3.5 billion dollars in private investment within two blocks of its route. It has 12,000 daily riders, supports 10,000 housing units, and has lead to 70 million fewer vehicle miles traveled in the Portland area each year.

Other communities were quick to take notice, recognizing the potential that streetcar offered for their own urban areas. In response, Congressman Blumenauer introduced legislation in the 108th Congress, the "Community Streetcar Development and Revitalization Act." This bill was folded into the 2005 federal transportation bill (the "Safe, Accountable, Flexible, Efficient Transportation Equity Act: A Legacy for Users Act," or SAFETEA-LU), creating a new program aimed at smaller projects that emphasized economic development as well as ridership numbers. This "Small Starts" program would match local funds to provide start-up and capital funding to develop and expand streetcar projects.

Under the Bush Administration, however, funding for the Small Starts Program proved problematic; the Federal Transportation Administration (FTA) refused to include economic development criteria in its funding formula. As a result, federal funding for streetcar programs throughout the country languished. Policy changes by the Obama Administration were celebrated by livability and streetcar advocates across the nation.

And there's good news for Portland, too:

The 2009 Omnibus Appropriations Bill included \$45 million for the Portland Streetcar Loop, which will extend the streetcar to the city's east side. This project will create 1,300 high-wage construction and manufacturing jobs in Oregon, attract 2.4 million square feet of new development in the area, and reduce regional vehicle miles traveled by 28 million miles. As new leadership in the FTA demonstrates support for the Small Starts Program, cities around the country are reactivating their applications for funding.

It is especially rewarding to Congressman Blumenauer to see 25 years of streetcar advocacy and work come to fruition. Congress and the Obama Administration have taken the steps needed to make streetcars a viable component of America's emerging low-carbon, economically sustainable future. Now cities have a real opportunity to embrace the Streetcar Renaissance and capture the value of this proven transportation option for their own communities. .



[The Portland Streetcar](#)

[Streetcar: A National Renaissance](#)

[Blumenauer on National Journal's "New Transit Guidelines and Improvement?"](#)

Streetcar in the News

NATIONWIDE: [Cities Rediscover the Allure of Streetcars](#)

NATIONWIDE: [Desire Grows for Streetcars](#)

OREGON: [U.S. Transportation Secretary Calls Portland's Streetcar, Light Rail a "Model" for Nation](#)

OREGON: [Streetcars Soon to Be Made in Oregon](#)

TEXAS: [Fort Worth, Explores Streetcar Viability](#)

ARIZONA: [Tuscon Looks for Modern Streetcar Funding](#)